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ABSTRACT

Three techniques of integrative FL testing are specifically discussed: dictation, cloze testing and noise testing. Studies show that dictation, when properly conducted, is a useful and efficient measure of overall language proficiency. Cloze testing is defined and illustrated with four examples, each with a different format. Noise or interference testing is briefly defined and three possible formats for such tests are suggested. All three devices test native-like language proficiency and are based on the redundancy, creativity and competence aspects of language. It is suggested that such testing be introduced periodically to keep abreast of students' interlanguage development and to replace the narrow focus of feature or chapter quizzes with total language testing. Test samples are appended. (Author/AMH)

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Current Trends in Foreign Language Testing

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I would like to begin today by telling you what I am NOT going to do. I am NOT going to tell you how to construct a quiz or a weekly test. I am NOT going to tell you how to test a chapter or unit in a particular text or how to test the students' knowledge of a particular feature of the grammar. In fact, I am NOT going to tell you how to DO anything.

Well, by now you must be asking yourself just what I am going to do. I intend to show you three testing techniques currently in use today. But before I do, I need to make it clear that what I am presenting are techniques to evaluate student competence in a particular language -- NOT techniques for evaluating performance during the week or after a unit or chapter. I think that every teacher is capable of making his or her own tests and quizzes without my help. The type of testing I will be presenting is called INTEGRATIVE language testing, because it focuses on the total language as a system of interrelated skills. This is the type of testing you can use from time to time to evaluate your students' competence in the language as a whole. That is to say, these are techniques for testing the language -- NOT for testing knowledge ABOUT a chapter or ABOUT past participle formation, for example. What these techniques focus on is competence, creativity and redundancy as features of all natural languages.

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The first of these three techniques is the DICTATION. That's hardly a new testing technique, you say. In fact, it's really a very old one. Studies completed at UCLA show that WHEN PROPERLY CONDUCTED,

a dictation is an extremely useful measure of overall proficiency of a language. It is an anticipatory exercise based on the redundancy, creativity and competence aspects of language. What is the proper way to conduct a dictation? First, a passage is read one time at conversational speed. The second time it is read with pauses at convenient phrase or clause boundaries while the students write down what they hear and leave blanks whenever they are uncertain. The third time the passage is read again at normal speed with occasional pauses to allow students to make corrections. Finally, the students are encouraged to go back through the dictation, rechecking what they have written and filling any blanks they may still have with words which fit the context. Scoring is a simple matter. One only needs to read through the students' papers and accept anything that is grammatical. A dictation does not necessarily have to result in exactly what was dictated. It is nice, if it does, but not necessary. A dictation given in this manner demands 1) the discrimination of phonological units, 2) decisions on word boundaries to discover sequences which make sense [that is, which are both grammatical and meaningful], and 3) the translation of this into graphic representations.

The second type of testing is called CLOZE testing. There seems to be a natural human tendency to fill gaps or blanks. CLOZE testing uses this tendency and the aspect of redundancy in language. The student is asked to predict what word should occur in a given context using the natural overmarking and redundant marking of information in all natural languages. This is similar to a conversation where you already know what someone is going to say before it is actually said.

There are two basic varieties of CLOZE tests. In the first variety, one simply deletes each nth word of a passage, where n usually is equal to 7 plus or minus 1. I have three examples of this type of cloze test to show you.

In the first example the student is asked to read through the entire passage and then to fill the blanks with the missing words. The context alone provides sufficient information in certain cases.

[EXAMPLE #1]

Scoring this type of test can be done in two ways. Either only the "exact word" is considered correct or a "contextually-acceptable word" is accepted. The correlation between "exact word" and "contextually-acceptable word" scoring has been found to be .97 in a series of studies. By far the easiest method, then, is the "exact word" scoring method.

In the second example a list of possible choices is placed at the bottom of the page and in the third example possible choices are placed underneath the blank. This results in a type of multiple choice cloze test. This particular form of cloze testing is better suited to students in lower level classes.

[EXAMPLES #2 and #3]

The second variety of cloze testing involves the insertion of "nonsense" words into a passage. The student is asked to quickly read through the passage and to either underline or circle the words which do not belong.

[EXAMPLE # 4]

As you can see, this type of testing does test the overall competence of a student in a language. It also requires a certain creativity on the part of the student and knowledge of the redundant marking system of the language in order to predict what possible words could fill a particular blank.

The third and last testing technique I intend to present today is "NOISE" or "INTERFERENCE" testing. Since language in an environment is always accompanied by some auditory interference or noise, the "NOISE" or "INTERFERENCE" test introduces noise or interference into the testing situation and makes use of the natural redundancy of language to compensate for the extra difficulty involved. The test does not need to be professionally made, since rather good results can be obtained by mixing shortwave radio static with the desired signal. Such a test can take three possible forms:

1. dictation
2. repetition onto a tape
3. multiple choice.

I have a few examples I would like to play for you.

[TAPE EXAMPLES]

A revised form of NOISE testing uses a conversational context and asks the student to write the final line of a conversation which is then mixed with NOISE. It is obvious that NOISE or INTERFERENCE testing does make use of the natural redundancy present in all languages and does test a student's overall competence in a language.

As I stated at the start, I have not TOLD you HOW to DO anything. I hope that I have at least SHOWN you three quick, efficient and reliable ways to keep abreast of your students' interlanguage competence.

I suggest that you might want to include these techniques periodically in your classes to replace the constant narrow focus of quizzes, chapter tests or feature tests with total language testing.

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EXAMPLE 1

THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT CONSIDERS CHILDREN THE MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN CHINA, AND IT PAYS A GREAT DEAL OF ATTENTION TO THEIR HEALTH AND EDUCATION. TO THE COMMUNISTS, CHILDREN REPRESENT _____ STATE OF TOMORROW, AND EVERY _____ IS BEING MADE TO TEACH _____ OF THEM TO READ AND _____, AND TO TRAIN THEM IN _____ COMMUNIST WAY OF LIFE.

BECAUSE _____ ARE NOT ENOUGH SCHOOLS OR _____ TEACHERS, EDUCATION IS NOT COMPULSORY _____ CHINA. THOSE CHILDREN WHO CAN _____ SCHOOL AT AGE THREE START _____ WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED A _____ SCHOOL. THE SCHOOL DAY STARTS _____ EARLY FOR ALL AGES. IN _____ LOWER CLASSES, CHILDREN ARE USUALLY _____ TO ARRIVE BEFORE 8 A.M. THEY _____ GIVEN BREAKFAST CONSISTING OF HOT _____, AND THEN THE TEACHERS LOOK _____ AT THEIR TEETH AND IN _____ EARS TO MAKE SURE THEY _____ CLEANED BEFORE THEY LEFT HOME. _____ IN CLEANLINESS IS AN IMPORTANT _____ OF CHINESE EDUCATION, AND CHINESE _____ ARE WELL SCRUBBED, EVEN THOUGH _____ OF THE WATER FOR WASHING _____ OBTAINED AT PUBLIC TAPS IN _____ CITIES, AND FROM WELLS OR _____ CANALS IN THE VILLAGES.

EXAMPLE 2

DECEMBER 28, 1976

DEAR TED,

ANOTHER CHRISTMAS HAS COME AND GONE. EVERY YEAR AT THIS TIME, I FEEL A LITTLE DEPRESSED. WE ALWAYS SPEND A LOT OF _____ PREPARING FOP THE BIG DAY AND _____ IT GOES BY TOO QUICKLY. NOW _____ HAVE TO PUT AWAY THE WRAPPING _____ AND DECORATIONS UNTIL NEXT YEAR. MOTHER _____ I FINALLY LEARNED OUR LESSON AND _____ OUR SHOPPING EARLY THIS YEAR. I _____ INTO CHICAGO IN NOVEMBER AND _____ MOST OF MY PRESENTS. I GOT _____ NIGHTGOWN FOR MOTHER AND I FOUND _____ FISHING ROD ON SALE FOR DAD. _____ HOPE YOU GOT THOSE BOOKS ON _____ I SENT YOU. WE KEPT A _____ OF YOUR OTHER PRESENTS HERE. WE _____ SURPRISE YOU WHEN YOU COME HOME _____ JULY. I HAD A LOT OF _____ TO BUY FOR MY FRIENDS AND _____ HAVE ENOUGH MONEY, SO I CHARGED _____ THINGS. THEN DAD LENT ME FIFTY _____ THE WEEK BEFORE CHRISTMAS, SO I _____ ABLE TO FINISH MY SHOPPING IN _____.

THANK YOU FOR THE CAMERA. I _____ SOME PICTURES WITH IT YESTERDAY AND _____ WILL SEND YOU PRINTS NEXT WEEK. _____ ALL MISS YOU. TAKE CARE OF _____ AND WRITE OFTEN.

LOVE, MARY

DROVE	PAPER	DID	AND	DIDN'T
TIME	A	I	TIME	YOURSELF
SURELY	DOLLARS	THEN	TOMORROW	WE
A	TOOK	FLY	LOT	WILL
WAS	I	SOME	IN	PRESENTS
BOUGHT	WE	OURSELVES	THE	SAILING

EXAMPLE 3

THERE ONCE WAS A CITY STREET WITH A ROW OF TREES, ONE IN FRONT OF EACH BROWNSTONE HOUSE. IT WAS [SUCH / SO / A / VERY] LOVELY STREET. BIRDS SANG IN THE [NOISE / TREES / GRASSES / FAR] , PEOPLE SWEPT THE PORCHES AND SAT [ONCE / THERE / THEIR / MORE] ON HOT SUMMER NICHTS ENJOYING THE [YEARS / WILL / STARS / TIMES] . ALL THE HOUSES WERE LIVED IN [TO / AND / BUT / FOR] ONE. IT HAD BEEN EMPTY A [SOME / LONG / END / WITH] TIME. THE STREET WITH ITS TREES [AND / IN / WHILE / TO] BIRDS BEGAN TO ATTRACT MORE AND [KIND / TOO / OF / MORE] ELEGANT PEOPLE. THESE NEW PEOPLE DID [NOT / LIKE / EAT / FOR] SIT OUT ON THEIR PORCHES AT NIGHT TO WATCH THE STARS.

Gandhi, The Leader of India

When Gandhi was 17 years old he went to England to study law. Most people in the prance small state where ong his family lived were shocked zisly that a Hindu should go to a foreign brank country, and when after 3 years he zum came home, he found no whence place for himself. So, as both his parents were dead, he decided to mumbly take a job as a lawyer in South Africa, where sharly many Indians lived. He stayed in Africa for 21 years, and romply during this time he began his fight for justice. Four but he never used violence, and taught wan his many followers to somply find peaceful ways of fighting injustice.

In 1914, at some the beginning of the First World War, Gandhi came so back to India. By simba that time he was famous for his an non-violent resistance nimply to injustice and was hailed as a tumped leader. He was convinced that sie India would never fid get rid of dreadful sare things like child marriages and the harsh treatment of the Untouchables under uller British rule. He ymgimp was convinced that only swyyer an Indian could lead the Indians to change terery their customs.